

### Five billion years of global change: a history of the land

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to the agency of nation-states, cities and queer subjects *vis-à-vis* processes of globalization. Queers are not merely passive consumers of 'global gay', but are active producers of local sexual cultures which articulate in different ways with transnational sexual cultures, *both* influencing *and* influenced by 'global gay' consumer culture.

*The globalization of sexuality* is a timely intervention in current debates around the relationship between sexuality, globalization, national agency, GLQ rights and sexual citizenship, forcefully demonstrating the interpenetration and mutual constitution of (local and global) sexual cultures and transnational economic formations, and thus providing a much-needed counter-argument to the economic reductionism of recent work on queer globalization from a political economy perspective.

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ANDREW GORMAN-MURRAY

**Five billion years of global change: a history of the land.** By Denis Wood. New York: Guilford Press. 2004. 336 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN 157230 958X.

The 'five billion years' of Denis Wood's title is in fact a dramatic understatement. Wood argues that that if we are to understand the current global predicament we need a long run-up. A very long one. In fact, he takes us all the way back to the earliest nanoseconds of the Big Bang, which, as I now know, took place about 11 billion years ago (for those in the Anglo orbit – those are American billions). Then Wood works his way, step by step, aeon by aeon, to our globalized present.

It's not easy to get critical purchase on a work that offers an integrated theory of just about everything. One way we might characterize Wood's book is as a counterpoint to a tendency in recent social thought – both popular and academic – to treat life in a globalized world in a kind of horizontal or flattened-out manner. Although, as far as I am aware, only one author has actually resurrected the term 'flat earth', a great deal of the writing which addresses the processes of 'globalization' and the condition of 'globality' treats the earth as a kind of static, featureless arena on which ever more frenetic social mobilities and interconnectivities play themselves out. Ironically, the uptake of environmental concerns in the humanities—with all its attention to novel forms of trans-border seepage and flow—often compounds this sense of dynamic socio-technical change stirring up the surface of a passive, or merely reactive, planetary body. What Wood impresses upon us is the necessity of understanding the deep formative processes that have made the earth and all its life forms, including *Homo sapiens*, what they are today. His take on the 'global' reaches beyond the many mobilizations associated with what we call 'modernity' into earlier, sometimes much earlier, movements of our species across the planet. And further still into the wanderings and interminglings of other species, the couplings of life and its physical environments, and the dynamic interactions between rock, air and water. What we have come to think

of as 'our' global condition, Wood asserts, only makes sense in the light of a more encompassing 'globality' that has been doing its thing for billions of years.

These are timely and welcome insights. But, of course, this is also far from an original story, as the author is well aware. Wood makes it clear from the outset that this is a work of synthesis. It is equally apparent that the book seeks to appeal to a popular audience, as well as students of all levels. But while the quest for accessibility may be admirable, I suspect that many will find that Wood's chatty, chummy and often frat-boy-flavoured prose can grate. To be sure, there are moments of great charm and eloquence throughout the book. But a pace and style that seems to assume the reader has some kind of attention deficit rarely leaves room for the kind of quiet awe and contemplation that such observations invite. Too frequently, clumps of anecdote and clusters of association intrude on what could have been an elegant integration of social, biophysical and cosmological history.

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**The planting of New Virginia: settlement and landscape in the Shenandoah Valley.** By Warren R. Hofstra. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2004. 432 pp. US\$49.95 cloth. ISBN 0 8018 7418 1.

In this richly textured settlement history of the Shenandoah Valley, the author meticulously reconstructs the complex forces that shaped the cultural landscape of this important frontier region in the 18th century. Hofstra's narrative traces the evolution of settlement within this region from discrete open-country neighbourhoods to the 'town and country' landscape that in many ways characterized later western settlement. Through the use of impressive original sources, Hofstra brings this period of history to life, providing a window into the daily lives and ambitions of these frontier men and women. More than 50 illustrations, ranging from original maps and town plans to photographs of barns and homes, will particularly appeal to historical geographers with interests in the material culture of this region.

*The planting of New Virginia* adds to our understanding of this frontier period in three key areas. First, Hofstra goes beyond traditional explanations of settlement that rely heavily on the role of land speculation. The author instead focuses on imperial pressures that encouraged settlement within the Great Valley as a strategic buffer zone designed to keep France from expanding its influence between Canada and Louisiana and thereby surrounding Britain's North American colonies. Settlement in the valley was also beneficial for Britain because it prevented the wilderness from providing a haven for runaway slaves. Second, the author weaves the involvement of Native Americans throughout the narrative – an aspect of the story noticeably lacking in many earlier American histories. The misunderstandings and occasional hostilities between Native Americans and Europeans helped shape the landscape of the Great Valley, and perhaps had more of an influence than imperial forces. This conflict was a centralizing force, which encouraged settlers to establish towns and organize militias. The third key